

Whistle While You Work

Proverbs 31

“She looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight.”

Proverbs 31:13-20

Take a moment to jot down what a typical day entails for you.

Now write down the free time that you normally have in a week.

For most of us, we are running at a frenzied pace every day, trying to accomplish everything that is on our to-do lists, and failing miserably on most days. I always dread the end of the day when I must sit down and transfer the list of things that I did not yet accomplish to tomorrow's already full list.

A rare few of us may be at a point of life that allows a great deal of free time. Sometimes we even have more free time than is comfortable, especially when we are in a situation that we cannot do all of the things that we want to be doing. Sometimes we are forced into stillness by isolation or physical limitations.

Have you ever experienced one of these points of life?

Whether we are overworked and tired or halted and restless, we can learn much about our attitude toward work from Proverbs 31.

This chapter teaches us that we are to be diligent with the tasks that God has given us to do. Part of giving our best to the tasks which God has set before us is not taking on more than God has given us. In today's busy and competitive culture, we often invent things that are not our responsibility and end up drained because we act like they are. Simplifying is a difficult task, though a necessary one, especially in our society in which we are instructed to pursue everything but simplicity.

Christ's life on earth is an example to us of simplicity. He was certainly not one who "had it all." Rather, He led a very focused life, though not focused on the many good and potentially profitable options that were surely available to Him, but focused simply on what God had tasked him with.

Nancy Leigh DeMoss, in her book *Lies Women Believe*¹, states that the number one lie that women believe is that "I don't have time to do everything I am supposed to do."

Have you fallen prey to believing this lie? Why is it so easy to believe?

¹DeMoss, N.L. (2001). *Lies women believe and the truth that sets them free*. Chicago: Moody Press.

“He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power.”

Isaiah 40:29

This is a lie that is easily believed when we have people offering opportunities and requesting help on so many sides, but in truth, we only have to do what God has assigned us to do. While God’s assignments may still seem intimidating, He will provide all we need for these tasks (and His list for us is probably actually quite short compared to the lists others may compile for us!).

Isaiah 40:29-31 says, “He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.” Psalms is similarly abounding with verses that communicate that God is the source of our strength. Spending time with Him and in His Word is important in order to soak up this strength we so desperately need to face the world each day. A couple other principles that we see demonstrated in Scripture are spending time alone for renewal, of which Jesus is a good example (Matthew 14:13, Mark 1:35, Luke 4:42, Luke 5:16, John 6:15), and allowing others to help and encourage us. An illustration of this idea is found in Exodus 17:11. The Israelites are in battle against an enemy army and as long as Moses holds up his hands, they are victorious, but when he lowers his hands, the enemy begins to defeat Israel. This continues all day long. Surely he began to feel pain. He must have found it harder to continue the longer he did it, and after a while, he began to feel that he just could not continue to do it anymore. Then Moses’ two friends came alongside him and held up his arms until the end of the day. Moses was willing to lay aside any pride or fear of looking weak and let his two friends help him in his time of need.

Has there been a time when pride drove you beyond what you could handle? What happened?

We need to cultivate relationships in which we can be fed and nurtured and relationships in which we are the one pouring into another’s life. Some relationships may have both aspects of this, but we must make sure that we have a balance.

The majority of the verses of Proverbs 31 are speaking of the variety of work that the woman did, and it is an exhausting list. The tasks this woman accomplished may not be the same as the ones that we have on our to-do lists, but that does not negate the lessons we can learn from this passage of scripture. Proverbs 31 says quite a bit about the work that the virtuous woman does, but the most amazing thing is not the long list of tasks that she accomplished, but the attitude with which she did it. She is obviously doing all the things she did with a heart of joy. How?

Verse 30 gives the answer. She feared the Lord. She was not so much focused on the tasks or the list of things that she had to do. She was part of a deep and healthy relationship with the Lord which gave her energy, motivation, and strength.

When our aim is to impress the people around us, or even measure up to our own unattainable standards, we will end up depleted. We may accomplish a lot, but not with the joy that the Lord desires us to have.

This does not have the same sense of parents telling their children “you’re going to do your chores, and you’re going to like it!” Rather, the idea is that out of His deep love for us, the Lord desires the best for us and wants us to experience life in its fullest and most joyful form (John 10:10).

“Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.”

Proverbs 31:30

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

John 10:10b

When we find that we are becoming overwhelmed and drained, that is a sign that something is going wrong. That may mean that we need to stop and take a moment to adjust a wrong attitude and seek God for what the right one is and His perspective on the situation. It may be a sign that we have not taken the time in God’s presence that we need, or that we have not gotten enough sleep. Though it is not always possible to take the time then and there to care for our minds, bodies, and spirits in the middle of a crisis, we must be careful not to live lives that continually neglect care of these areas. Sometimes caring for ourselves must wait, and we can ask God for strength to make it through. But do not put it off forever. It is important to be filled and refreshed from time to time. God designed us this way, and is a healthy sign of our humanness.

What is the heart behind this woman’s actions? She sounds like a workaholic, but is she? No. We can see that the Proverbs 31 woman is not driven, but rather inspired to do the things she does. When we are driven to work, we feel like we have to always be accomplishing more and better to earn the love, attention, or approval that we crave from those around us. We try to measure our worth what we get done and how well we do it. This does not work in the long run. We get depleted and feel like we are never doing enough. God does not desire this type of work from us.

We can tell that the work of the Proverbs 31 woman comes from a joyous and willing heart. Verse 13 says that she “works with her hands with delight.” The word delight here is from the Hebrew *chêphets* which means pleasure, desire, or willingly. The Proverbs 31 woman is inspired to do her work.

How do we get this same inspiration? The work is inspired by love. Once again we see that the direction of what we are to do and the strength with which to do it comes from our source for all we need, the Lord.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?
